Criticizing Definitions

Philosophy and Logic
Unit 3, Section 3.4
The fundamental requirement

• In any adequate definition, the definiens and the definiendum must have **exactly the same extension**.
  – The term defined and the terms doing the defining must be true of exactly the same things.
Necessary & sufficient

Definiendum *if and only if* definiens

Entails both:

- *definiendum if definiens*
  - Failure of this condition = an incorrect *sufficient condition*

- *definiendum only if definiens*
  - Failure of this condition = an incorrect *necessary condition*
Same concept, new words

• “That definition is too broad!”
  “That definition is too narrow!”
• Hint:
  – What is “too broad” or “too narrow”?
  – Answer: the extension of the defining terms, of the definiens
    • too broad = includes too much
    • too narrow = includes too little
Alternative critique

\textit{Lawnmower} =df. A motorized appliance for trimming vegetation that grows in the lawn

\textit{a}. Is the definition too broad? If so, provide an example that shows it is too broad.

\textit{b}. Is the definition too narrow? If so, provide an example that shows it is too narrow.
Too broad

A definition is too broad if and only if the defining terms are true of something of which the defined term is not true.

Something that is a motorized appliance... but is not a lawnmower.

This shows that the extension of the defining terms includes something that is not in the extension of the defined term. The definiens is “too broad”.
Too broad

The extension of the *definiendum* (term to be defined)
Too broad

The extension of the definiens (terms doing the defining)

The extension of the definiendum (term to be defined)
Too broad

The extension of the *definiens* (terms doing the defining)

Things of which *definiens* is true but *definiendum* is not

The extension of the *definiendum* (term to be defined)
Too narrow

a definition is too narrow if and only if the defining terms are not true of something of which defined term is true.

Something which is a lawnmower but which is not a motorized appliance for trimming vegetation that grows in the lawn.

Here the extension of the defining terms fails to include something that is in the extension of the defined term. The definiens are “too narrow”.
Too narrow

The extension of the *definiendum* (term to be defined)
Too narrow

The extension of the definiens (terms doing the defining)

The extension of the *definiendum* (term to be defined)
Too narrow

Things of which the definiens is *not* true but the definiendum is

The extension of the definiens (terms doing the defining)

The extension of the *definiendum* (term to be defined)
Truth tables to the rescue, again

A definition says: \( P \equiv D \)
and is false in two cases:

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the term to be defined (*definiendum*)

the terms doing the defining (*definiens*)

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The term to be defined (*definiendum*)

The terms doing the defining (*definiens*)

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The definition is too *narrow*
the term to be defined (*definiendum*)

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The definition is too *narrow*

The definition is too *broad*
the term to be defined (*definiendum*)

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Too *narrow*. Fails as a *necessary* condition.

Too *broad*. Fails as a *sufficient* condition.
Both too broad & too narrow

The extension of the *definiendum* (term to be defined)
Both too broad & too narrow

The extension of the *definiendum* (term to be defined)

The extension of the *definiens* (terms doing the defining)
Both too broad & too narrow

The extension of the *definiendum* (term to be defined)

The extension of the *definiens* (terms doing the defining)

Shows the definition is too broad
Both too broad & too narrow

Shows the definition is also too narrow

The extension of the *definiendum* (term to be defined)

Shows the definition is too broad

The extension of the *definiens* (terms doing the defining)
Consider the following inadequate definition:

\[ \text{taxes} = \text{df. the seizing of wages or property of private individuals by the government} \]

a. Is the definition too broad? If so, provide a counter-example which shows that it is too broad.

(e.g., something that is a “seizing of wages…etc” but is not a tax)
Part b.

\textit{taxes =df. the seizing of wages or property of private individuals by the government}

b. Is the definition too narrow? If so, provide a counter-example which shows that it is too narrow.

\textit{(e.g., something that \textit{is} a tax but is \textit{not} a “seizing of wages…etc”)}
Part c.

c. Which of your examples shows that the definition fails to give a correct *sufficient* condition for the term?
   (the one that shows it is too broad)

c. Which of your examples shows that the definition fails to give a correct *necessary* condition for the term?
   (the one that shows it is too narrow)
Connotation

Terms differ in **connotation** if they indicate differing attitudes towards or evaluations of a given state of affairs. They might be made true by the same fact or actuality.

Bob Dole is an experienced leader.
Bob Dole has been in Congress since 1968.
Bob Dole is a Washington insider.
The Word Substitution test

Is this a loaded term?

Try to think of other words that are true of the same facts or actualities, but which put a different “spin” on them.

If you can: you’ve got some “spin”!
**Reuters Statement**

**On Use of ‘Terrorist’**

We write in response to the confusion surrounding the use of the word “terrorist” in Reuters news stories.

We lost six members of the Reuters family and offices that housed 550 others who thankfully survived. From the first moments after the attacks, Reuters staff around the world worked tirelessly to account for their colleagues, restore our information services to customers, and report the news.

However, these efforts have been overshadowed by the controversy over the policy of our editorial group to avoid using emotional terms such as “terrorist” in their news stories. This policy has served Reuters and, more importantly, our readers well by ensuring access to news as it occurs, wherever it occurs. As a global news organization reporting from 160 countries, Reuters’ mission is to provide accurate and impartial accounts of events so that individuals, organizations and governments can make their own decisions based on the facts.

Nonetheless, in an internal memo reminding our journalists of our policy in the immediate aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks, a statement was made that “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.” This wording caused deep offense among members of our staff, our readers and the public at large, many of whom felt this meant Reuters was somehow making a value judgment concerning the attacks. This was never our intention, nor is it our policy. Our policy is to avoid the use of emotional terms and not make value judgments concerning the facts we attempt to report accurately and fairly. We apologize for the insensitive manner in which we characterized this policy and we extend our sympathy to all those who have been affected by these tragic events.

**TOM GLOVER**
Chief Executive Officer
GEERT LINNENBANK
Editor-in-Chief
Reuters Group

New York
The Republican plan slashes Medicare. The Republican plan cuts benefits over what they would have been.
The Republican plan cuts the rate of growth of Medicare expenses from 11% per year to 7% per year.
The Republican plan increases Medicare benefits at twice the rate of inflation, while currently they are growing at three times the rate.
The Republican plan increases total Medicare spending by $151 billion over 7 years, while Clinton’s plan increases it by $176 billion.

– All true!
1. Name the “fallacy of clarity” this passage most clearly commits.

2. Complete the following technical definitions.
- extension
- intension
- connotation

- ambiguous
- vague
- collective attribution; distributive attribution

- definiens
- definiendum

- necessary condition; sufficient condition
- too broad; too narrow
3. Some true/false questions on principles of adequate definition.

4. “Consider the following inadequate definition…”
   – A suggestion: review the definitions of terms from unit 1!
terrorist =df. someone who kills civilians for political ends

correct necessary condition?
correct sufficient condition?
teacher = df. someone who conveys knowledge to others

too broad?

too narrow?
capital punishment =df. putting someone to death

an action is immoral if and only if it needlessly hurts someone.